

central portions 46 are tightly gathered together at a single location. A fastening device 52 having a tubular frustoconical configuration in then passed over a free end 54 of cord 50 and biased against the cow hitch so as to securely hold the cow hitch by frictional engagement. Further disclosure with regard to fastening device 52 and alternative embodiments and configurations thereof are disclosed in United States Patent Number Nos. 5,766,700 and 5,946,780 which are incorporated herein by specific reference. The '780 patent also provide disclose with regard to different types and configurations of materials that can be used for tube 10.

[027] Fastening device 52 is position so as to face central opening 31. As a result, fastening device 52 is not openly exposed in the final formation of bath sponge 60. In one embodiment, free end 54 of cord 50 is trimmed back adjacent to fastening device 52 so that no loose ends are present.

[028] In one embodiment, central portions 48 are secured together using substantially the same process that central portions 46 are secured together. That is, a separate cord 56 and fastening device 57 are used to tightly secure together each of central portions 48 at a discrete location using a cow hitch. Cord 56 has an elongated continuous loop configuration. In this regard, a free end 58 of cord 56 extends from fastening device 57 in a loop configuration so as to form a handle.

[029] It is appreciated that the use of a cord and fastening device is only one of many different ways that can be used for securing together central portions 46 and central portions 48. By way of example and not by limitation, cord, string, wire, ribbon, or any other type of line can be independently wrapped or tied around the central portions without the use of any type of fastening device. Furthermore, as discussed above, the fastening devices can have a variety of different configurations. It is also

appreciated that various crimping rings, self-locking plastic ties, and other conventional forms of attachment can be used. In addition, the handle formed by free end 58 of cord 56 can be added separately from the structure that is used to secure central portions 48.

[030] Once central portions 46 and 48 are secured, bands 30 are removed from support structure 32. As depicted in Figure 7, bands 30 automatically rebound from their stretched position into a substantially spherical configuration, thereby forming bath sponge 60. Each band 30 of bath sponge 60 is biased on at least one side by an adjacent band 30. Central opening 31 of each band 30 is cumulatively disposed within bath sponge 60 so as to form a central pocket 62. Central pocket 62 can be access by slots 64 formed between each of bands 30.

[031] Because bands 30 are secured together twice, once at each central portion 46 and 48, bath sponge 60 is more durable and resistant to unraveling. Moreover, the formation of central pocket 62 facilitates rinsing and drying bath sponge 60. Furthermore, the formation of central pocket 62 allows for soap or other objects to be selectively placed within central pocket 62. For example, a solid soap product, children's toy, stuffed animal, and/or other object can be placed within central pocket 62.

[032] To help prevent an object from slipping out of central pocket 62, the object can be secured to the cord or other line used in securing central portions 46 and 48 together. Furthermore, additional mesh netting or other material can be placed in the center to act as a chamber for holding the object. For example, a shell of flexible mesh material can be placed, tied, or bound within central pocket 62. Alternatively, a sufficient number of bands 30 can be used so that bands 30 are sufficiently tightly

packed to securely hold the object within central pocket 62 but yet allow selective removal of the object.

[033] The finished product is a bath sponge that has improved strength and durability. In addition, the sponge is simple and easy to produce, long lasting, and more resistant to unraveling. Also, the bath sponge has a unique look and feel that is an alternative to those disclosed in the prior art. The sponge is not only aesthetically pleasing but is also tactilely pleasing and gentle on the skin. This is because the sponge has a substantially smooth exterior surface.

[034] The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its spirit or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.